

Selections from
RAM DASS's
"Compassion in Action"

*a course presented in New York City
during the Fall of 1988
at St. John the Divine Cathedral*

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when they are lost on the roller coaster of life.

The drama of life is wonderful, it's intense, you know you're alive in it—and yet, without that equanimity to balance it, it always has in it fear. Only when you have cultivated the equanimity, the space where you are always present quietly, clearly, only then are you able to be with life with love, with openness, with safety, with invulnerability.

It is said that God, guru, and self are one and the same thing. For some of you, you have a relationship with God; for others of you, you have a relationship with a teacher or guru; for others, you find that place within your own heart, in the middle of your chest. It's all the same.

PROGRAM #7

We have now been together, many of us, for three months. I want to reflect a bit with you about what we have been through. I thought I might start off by just reflecting about what's happened to me over these few months.

The class has been a really interesting experiment from my point of view. One objective was that this group would actually involve themselves in volunteer action in the community whether of an advocacy or direct service component, and as such would actually help relieve suffering in the world. That was one objective.

A second objective was that through that process we would get a chance to examine our own attitudes and come to understand the nature of the attitudinal structures because we are not only the solution, we're the problem, and for us to understand ourselves as the problem was what I was interested in—my self as the problem as one of them.

I went into the course with the model that if we could understand how we would change our own attitudes, we might be able to make a contribution in the attitudes which are the root structure in the society that accounted for how we

could allow our fellow human beings to be going through what they're going through in the midst of a culture of such plenty. It's hard for all of us emotionally to comprehend that—that the problem lay in middle class attitudes and that people like Mayor Koch are not the villain, they're all totally reactive to who we are. And that as we accept responsibility for change, change happens.

And how do we empower ourselves to act? I felt that I had a lot to learn from the political activist community, the Listeners' Action community, and so on, as to how you act in those conditions.

So what I found myself doing is just what has happened to me in Seva: I found myself becoming politicized. I found myself as a spiritual person realizing now that what it means to get out and do it, means to get into extremely complex power structures, and to do it with sufficient love and sufficient good grace.

Because it isn't bad guys and good guys. It's merely a system that isn't working. It's a system that isn't working. And the system includes us. So part of what I learned was that there is a tremendous amount of opportunity for bringing more consciousness into the arena of social change. Of just having people be of good appreciation of each other, as good human beings that would like to make the system work.

I felt uncomfortable in the March when Donald Trump and Mayor Koch were being singled out to be maligned. I mean I have no brief for Donald Trump or Mayor Koch to tell you the truth. But at the same moment, scapegoating isn't a solution to the problem. It's too reductionistic, it's too simplistic, it's too naive. And it doesn't have a good heart space connected with it. And part of our work has got to be to work from the heart in the way we do these things, so the heart of this city is healed by the way the action occurs.

And as much as I admire Jesse Jackson and I admire what he stands for and I admire how outspoken he has been, I did not think his speech at the March was a new kind of speech. It was an old style speech. It was a canned speech. And we can do better than that. We really can. And he can do better than that. The challenge has got to be set though for us to be more creative in the way we play these games. And more conscious. And we've got to slow down a little bit to do it—in our signs, in our symbols, in our promotion, in the way in which we relate to each other.

I went into this feeling that the housing and homelessness issue in the United States was so big and amorphous because it involves the people that we heard about from Diane Sonde last time, the people that have been made homeless when the whole legal structure about mental hospitals changed, and we're dealing with issues of unemployment, and we're dealing with issues of rent structures, and we're dealing with issues of

eight years of Reaganomics and the reduction in the budgets for housing, and the thing was so complex I couldn't even feel how to get hold of it, because everybody was pointing the finger somewhere else, everybody said 'Well, they're to blame; fix that one, it's not us, it's them.'

But then you realize it's really collective responsibility. It's all of us. It's all of us. And it's first of all, all of us recognizing that we want to solve the problem.

And I've been examining more and more deeply, through this course and through the experiences of these past few months, where our consciousness remains in relation to the issues of suffering.

I can feel the way in which I emotionally respond. Like I go out with the van on Project Reach Out, and I see the caringness with which people on the streets are treated by the people in the van and the love with which they try to help them get their lives together. And I went to Covenant House, and I stayed at a shelter, and I've been talking to more and more people in all the different kinds of projects: at some of the elder communities, and so on.

What I've experienced is, first of all, is that the whole problem: whether it's the middle class that's trying to serve or the people that are without homes, what we're dealing with is a lot of human beings that are in pain, and the pain is on both sides of the curtain. The pain is certainly not

exclusively with the homeless people. That's very clear to me now. And that part of the pain is created by the dynamics of the way we each interact with the other. Not even the problems of the economics, but the problems of the way we interact.

And I'm finding out with all the suffering in the world, whether it's Guatemalan widows, or whether it's blind people in Nepal, or whether it's people with AIDS that I'm talking to, or people that are just caught in their own compulsion of their minds, or whether it's people in the street—that suffering in the abstract is one thing, but that in the concrete it's an entirely different thing. That when you sit down with a fellow human being and deal with the stuff they're dealing with, it's a whole different ball game than when you start to talk about suffering in the abstract. And that when you deal with suffering in the specific, it is 'deal-able with.'

It is possible to just sit down with another human being. And a lot of you, I think, found out that when you dealt on the street with one person, suddenly it turned away from some abstract thing of 'homeless person' into some human being with a life history, with a problem, with real stuff, and they needed a coat or a blanket or there was something you actually could do.

I must say that these past few months my heart has also been in turmoil a lot because sometimes I still don't know quite—I OFTEN don't